

Pertussis Advisory

This is to advise you that there has been one case of whooping cough (pertussis) at the Acushnet Elementary School. At this time, there are no recommendations for antibiotics among classmates or staff, but parents and guardians should be aware of the signs and symptoms of pertussis. Symptomatic close contacts of the case should be evaluated by their health care providers for pertussis.

- What is pertussis?** Pertussis (also called whooping cough) is a disease caused by bacteria that spreads from person to person with close contact. Pertussis is often mild in older children and adults, but can cause serious problems in infants.
- Who gets pertussis?** In MA, pertussis is most common among people 10-20 years old who have lost the protection they got from childhood vaccines. Infants are also likely to get the disease since they are often too young to have full protection from the vaccine.
- What are the symptoms?** Pertussis is a cough illness whose symptoms can range from mild to severe. It usually begins with cold-like symptoms, with a runny nose, sneezing and dry cough. After two weeks of cold-like symptoms, the cough slowly gets worse. The next stage, which may last from four to six weeks, may be marked by coughing spells that are uncontrollable and may be followed by vomiting. Between spells, the person may appear to be well and usually there is no fever. These typical symptoms are more common in infants and young children. Vaccinated children, teens and adults may have milder symptoms that can seem like bronchitis.
- How is pertussis spread?** The germs that cause pertussis live in the nose, mouth and throat and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. Other people can then inhale the germs in the droplets produced by the person with pertussis. Touching a tissue or sharing a cup used by someone with the disease can also spread the disease. The first symptoms usually appear 7 to 10 days after a person is exposed, although sometimes people do not get sick for up to 21 days after their last exposure. Your child's last exposure was more than 2 weeks ago.
- How is pertussis diagnosed?** A doctor may think a patient has pertussis based on their symptoms, however, a culture or blood test are the only ways to be sure. The culture is taken by swab from the back of the nose if the patient has been coughing for two weeks or less. In children 11 years and older, a blood test can be done when the cough has persisted for longer than two weeks.
- How can pertussis be prevented?** Although DTaP vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis) usually provides protection against pertussis to children, the effects of the vaccine wear off over time, leaving most teens and adults at risk of the disease. However, there is a vaccine for teens and adults, called Tdap that is now recommended to give protection against pertussis in these age groups. Tdap is given as a single "booster" dose. If your child or adolescent (10 years of age or older) has not yet had a dose of Tdap, contact your healthcare provider to discuss receiving this vaccine. If your child is less than 7 years of age, they should be up to date (check with you provider if you are unsure).

**Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Division of Epidemiology and Immunization**

What should I do?

Watch your child for symptoms that may develop over the next week. If your child develops symptoms, he/she may need to be tested for pertussis by your family's health care provider. Please contact your health care provider and bring this advisory with you. Students who are symptomatic and who have had close contact with this case of pertussis (as identified by the school nurse) may be excluded from school unless they have been coughing for more than 21 days or until they have completed 5 days of appropriate antibiotic therapy.

If you have any questions about this advisory,
please call Joanne Masson, Acushnet Elementary School nurse at 508-998-0255
or
the Massachusetts Immunization Program at (617) 983-6800.